

## **§ 1415.12**

## **7 CFR Ch. XIV (1–1–12 Edition)**

funds for payment of any costs associated with the completion of the restoration agreement. The eligible entity may, with participant consent, revise an existing restoration agreement or develop a new restoration agreement. Restoration plans must be consistent with the GRP management plan or any associated conservation plan as described in § 1415.4.

(m) Cooperating entities under § 1415.17 will be responsible for development, administration, and implementation costs of restoration plans.

### **§ 1415.12 Modifications to easements and rental contracts.**

(a) After an easement has been recorded, no substantive modification will be made to the easement. Modifications that would not result in acquisition or divestiture of additional property rights may be made.

(b) State Conservationists may approve modifications for restoration agreements and GRP management plans or conservation plans where applicable, as long as the modifications do not affect the provisions of the easement and meet program objectives.

(c) USDA may approve modifications to rental contracts, including corresponding changes to conservation plans, GRP management plans, and restoration plans to facilitate the practical administration and management of the enrolled area so long as the modification will not adversely affect the grassland functions and values for which the land was enrolled.

### **§ 1415.13 Transfer of land.**

(a) Any transfer of the property prior to an applicant's acceptance into the program will void the offer of enrollment, unless at the option of the State Conservationist or State Executive Director, as appropriate, an offer is extended to the new landowner and the new landowner agrees to the same easement or rental contract terms and conditions.

(b) After acreage is accepted in the program, for easements with multiple payments, any remaining easement payments will be made to the original participant unless NRCS receives an assignment of proceeds.

(c) Future annual rental payments will be made to the successor participant.

(d) The new landowner is responsible for complying with the terms of the recorded easement, and the contract successor is responsible for complying with the terms of the rental contract and for assuring completion of all activities and practices required by any associated restoration agreement. Eligible cost-share payments will be made to the new participant upon presentation that the successor assumed the costs of establishing the practices.

(e) With respect to any and all payments owed to participants, the United States bears no responsibility for any full payments or partial distributions of funds between the original participant and the participant's successor. In the event of a dispute or claim on the distribution of cost-share payments, USDA may withhold payments, without the accrual of interest, pending an agreement or adjudication on the rights to the funds.

(f) The rights granted to the United States in an easement will apply to any of its agents or assigns. All obligations of the participant under the GRP conservation easement deed also bind the participant's heirs, successors, agents, assigns, lessees, and any other person claiming under them.

(g) Rental contracts may be transferred to another landowner, operator, or tenant that acquires an interest in the land enrolled in GRP. The successor must be determined by FSA to be eligible to participate in GRP and must assume full responsibility under the contract. FSA may require a participant to refund all or a portion of any financial assistance awarded under GRP, plus interest, if the participant sells or loses control of the land under a GRP rental contract, and the new landowner, operator, or tenant is not eligible to participate in the program or declines to assume responsibility under the contract.

### **§ 1415.14 Misrepresentation and violations.**

(a) The following provisions apply to violations of rental contracts:

(1) Rental contract violations, determinations, and appeals are handled in

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accordance with the terms of the rental contract;

(2) A participant who is determined to have erroneously represented any fact affecting a program determination made in accordance with this part may not be entitled to rental contract payments and must refund to CCC all payments, plus interest, in accordance with part 1403 of this title; and

(3) In the event of a violation of a rental contract, the participant will be given notice and an opportunity to voluntarily correct the violation within 30 days of the date of the notice, or such additional time as CCC may allow. Failure to correct the violation may result in termination of the rental contract.

(b) The following provisions apply to violations of easement deeds:

(1) Easement violations are handled under the terms of the easement deed;

(2) Upon notification of the participant, NRCS has the right to enter upon the easement area at any time to monitor compliance with the terms of the GRP conservation easement deed or remedy deficiencies or violations;

(3) When NRCS believes there may be a violation of the terms of the GRP conservation easement deed, NRCS may enter the property without prior notice; and

(4) The participant will be liable for any costs incurred by the United States as a result of the participant's negligence or failure to comply with the easement terms and conditions.

(c) USDA may require the participant to refund all or part of any payments received by the participant under the program contract or agreement.

(d) In addition to any and all legal and equitable remedies available to the United States under applicable law, USDA may withhold any easement payment, rental payment, or cost-share payments owing to the participant at any time there is a material breach of the easement covenants, rental contract, or any contract. Such withheld funds may be used to offset costs incurred by the United States in any remedial actions or retained as damages pursuant to court order or settlement agreement.

(e) Under a GRP conservation easement, the United States will be entitled to recover any and all administrative and legal costs, including attorney's fees or expenses, associated with any enforcement or remedial action.

### § 1415.15 Payments not subject to claims.

Any cost-share, rental, or easement payment or portion thereof due any person under this part will be allowed without regard to any claim or lien in favor of any creditor, except agencies of the United States Government.

### § 1415.16 Assignments.

(a) Any person entitled to any cash payment under this program may assign the right to receive such cash payments, in whole or in part.

(b) If a participant that is entitled to a payment dies, is declared legally incompetent, or is otherwise unable to receive the payment, or is succeeded by another person who renders or completes the required performance, such a participant may be eligible to receive payment in such a manner as USDA determines is fair and reasonable in light of all the circumstances.

### § 1415.17 Cooperative agreements.

(a) NRCS may enter into cooperative agreements which establish terms and conditions under which an eligible entity will use funds provided by NRCS to own, write, and enforce a grassland protection easement.

(b) To be eligible to receive GRP funding, an eligible entity must demonstrate:

(1) A commitment to long-term conservation of agricultural lands, ranch land, or grassland for grazing and conservation purposes;

(2) A capability to acquire, manage, and enforce easements;

(3) Sufficient number of staff dedicated to monitoring and easement stewardship;

(4) The availability of funds; and

(5) For nongovernmental organizations, the existence of a dedicated account and funds for the purposes of easement management, monitoring, and enforcement of each easement held by the eligible entity.